# TRENDS IN RECENT UNITED STATES SENATE ELECTIONS: INCUMBENCY, FINANCE, GENDER AND RACE

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A Thesis Submitted to The Honors College

In Partial Fulfillment of the Bachelor's degree

With Honors in

Political Science

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

May 2012

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**Abstract**

Though Senate elections are less studied than their House equivalency, there is still significant evidence that explains various trends occurring in the upper chamber of Congress in the past several decades. The Senate, like the House, falls victim to various biases including gender and race. In addition, there is an incumbency advantage in the Senate that proves almost as significant as in House competitions.

Despite these similarities, there are noteworthy disparities between House and Senate elections, many of which stem from the differences in term lengths and magnitude of constituencies. However, there are political scientists who believe the electoral outcomes are quite similar, despite these fundamental differences. One of the main contentions is the significance of House and Senate races as a referendum on the president. While it may be more noteworthy in House competitions, it certainly is influential in the Senate.

A significant facet of Senate elections studied extensively is the amount of funds needed to win the race. It should be no surprise that a significant majority of winners in the 2010 Senate race far outspent their competitors. There are several elections, however, where this proved false and the candidate with lesser funds defeated his or her competitor.

**I. Introduction**

In March of 1789, the first senators of the United States took office to represent their respective states. Each of the original states was to have two senators, regardless of population, as stated in the Constitution. This ruling was reached as a result of the Connecticut Compromise. This stated that the U.S. legislature would be split into a two-chamber system; a lower house based on proportional representation and the upper house requiring equal representation. Therefore, regardless of the population of the original thirteen states in the Union, each would get two senators in the federal government. The heavily populated states of New York and Virginia received the same Senate representation as the more sparsely populated states of New Jersey or Delaware. These original senators were appointed by the state legislatures. Not until the 17$^{th}$ Amendment passed in 1913 would voters elect members of the upper house by popular vote.

Since the origins of the United States Senate, many political aspects have changed. Candidates in the United States are unique in their style of campaigning for a congressional seat, as it is different than elections in most other countries. The candidate, rather than the political party, is the focus of each election. Each candidate vying for office must run his or her campaign, and voters are voting for that individual person. Once the candidate wins the primary in the initial phases, he or she may assume the party label. In many other countries, it is the political party that campaigns and seeks to win an election, while the candidate is just a representative of the party.

Just how different *are* Senate elections from those of House elections and presidential elections? Elections for the highest seat in government are certainly the most studied, as well as garnering the highest turnout. Voter turnout typically hovers around 50 to 60 percent in presidential elections, while congressional elections rarely exceed 35 percent (Flanigan, Zingale 1998, 33-36). However, House and Senate elections are arguably just as important in a functioning democracy like the United States, where the legislative and executive branches are completely separate. Congress has significant authority and has many avenues in avoiding presidential power. In addition, the legislative body is responsible for writing the laws that guide this country.

Though the president can exercise the rare authoritative veto, many times Congress can avoid presidential authority due to certain bureaucratic features of the government. Certainly the country needs the most qualified candidates to run for these positions due to the great extent of power each congressional seat possesses. In the race for Congress, certain candidates have advantages over their competition. A majority of the biases are based on gender, race, personality and whether the candidate is an incumbent. In order to get the most qualified candidates in office though, races must become very competitive. This will allow for the legislative branch to effectively rule and for unfair advantages to be at a minimum.

Much is written on U.S. House elections, likely because there are 435 occurring every two years. Most House members represent a small subsection of a state, though there are seven states that have only one U.S. Representative. Therefore, the candidate need not campaign to a state's entirety nor have to appeal to millions of constituents. Conversely, senators must visit every corner of the state and are accountable to upwards of 20+ million people in large states such as New York, Texas and California. The process for Senate hopefuls becomes even more difficult when the state is heavily divided in ideology. How does one appeal to a set of constituents within a state that hold completely opposite views?

The demographics of senators have changed dramatically since the founding of the two-chamber system, as has politics in general in the United States. Campaign finances have become a crucial aspect of elections. The candidate with more access to funds is undoubtedly the favorite, and typically indentifies as the incumbent candidate. There are few cases however, in which the challenger to an incumbent has proven successful. This is largely dependent on the success of the challenger's campaign. The art of the race must be analyzed, for negative campaigning can often be more effective. This style of politics highlights the faults of the incumbent rather than promoting the accomplishments of a challenger.

**II. Incumbent Popularity**

As electoral politics has changed in the past several decades, so has the type of candidate who becomes successful in elections. Before the 1970s, voters often relied on party labels as cues to decide which candidate was best. More recently however, incumbency has had a major effect in nearly all elections, particularly congressional elections. Incumbents hold the largest advantages, regardless of gender, ethnic background or any other demographic. Incumbent candidates use their plentiful resources to deter any potential competition from running. As stated in the *American Journal of Political Science*, incumbents do this by using name recognition, acquiring public support from other elites and out-fundraising the challenger. As a result, many possible competitors become intimidated and often decide not to run. According to Stone, Maisel and Maestas (2004), those that have the energy and passion to run are often not the most qualified. They do not have the necessary resources and skills to beat an incumbent, but decide to run anyways. The strongest potential challengers unfortunately shy away.

Incumbency has risen to record high levels in recent U.S. elections. Since the 1940s, the incumbency advantage has increased dramatically in all state and federal elections. Many are opposed to this, as it is often seen as an unfair advantage. It essentially vanishes any influence the electorate once had. The rise in incumbency has been attributed to many aspects of elected office, but a common belief is that party decline is the root of the cause. In addition, many feel that there has been a significant decline in challenger quality, therefore increasing the incumbency advantage (Ansolabehere, Snyder and Stewart 2000). Incumbents in U.S. House elections can boast a 95% reelection rate since the 1970s, slowly increasing from previous decades. Not only is this number extremely high, but the margin that the incumbents are winning began increasing to record numbers as well (Abramowitz 1991). For Senate candidates however, the incumbency rates are not quite as high.

Incumbents tend to dominate the little media attention that is paid to senatorial elections. A Senate election tends to be of lower priority for the news networks than that of a presidential election. Therefore, the electorate must actively seek out articles and headlines regarding these congressional elections. When reporters do find the time to pay attention to senatorial elections, it typically favors the incumbent over the challenger. According to Kim Kahn and Patrick Kenney (1999) in *The Spectacle of U.S. Senate Campaigns*, "an average of 32 paragraphs is devoted to the incumbents' positions on issues during the campaign, 20 paragraphs focus on the challengers' stands, and 40 paragraphs on those of open-race candidates."

Glenn R. Parker, distinguished political science professor at Purdue University, affirms that the most noted reason for accepting or rejecting an incumbent is the candidate's personality characteristics. Common qualities that are favored by constituents are honesty, sincerity, fairness and dedication. The degree to which voters value the personalities of candidates is not equal along party lines however, as Republican incumbents' characteristics have far greater influence than their Democratic counterparts. The action of voting based on certain qualities of a candidate or the incumbent is known in the political arena as trait voting (Parker 1981).

Danny Hayes studied the different traits associated with both the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. In his work "Trait Voting in U.S. Senate Elections", he found that Senate candidate traits are more heavily influenced by incumbency rather than party affiliation. However, trait voting does play a crucial role in elections, often determining which party a voter supports. In Hayes' study, Democrats hold a significant advantage over Republican senatorial candidates in the qualities of both compassion and empathy. This is likely due to the fact that candidates from the Democratic Party often stress policies relating to welfare and equality. Conversely, Republicans often benefit from the leadership trait. Hayes' study focused on the 2006 Senate midterm elections, which may limit the results more than a presidential election year. Though incumbency is more influential in determining perceptions of a candidate's personality, political parties also maintain certain stereotypes that can alter elections (Hayes 2010).

**III. Campaign Spending: Incumbents vs. Challengers**

**Table 2.1 "Incumbent vs. Challenger Spending in 2000 Senate Elections"**
*Source*: National Annenberg Election Survey 2000
*Note*: Bold candidate name indicates challenger beating incumbent

| State | Incumbent | Challenger | Incumbent's party | Incumbent's spending ($1000s) | Challenger's spending ($1000s) | Challenger's vote (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CA | D. Feinstein | T. Campbell | D | 11,822 | 4802 | 39.6 |
| CT | J. Lieberman | P. Giordano | D | 4498 | 1080 | 35.1 |
| DE | W. Roth | **T. Carper** | R | 4447 | 2609 | **56** |
| IN | R. Lugar | D. Johnson | R | 5248 | 1179 | 32.4 |
| ME | O. Snowe | M. Lawrence | R | 2333 | 736 | 31.1 |
| MD | P. Sarbanes | P. Rappaport | D | 2000 | 147 | 36.8 |
| MA | E. Kennedy | J. Robinson | D | 6304 | 150 | 15 |
| MI | S. Abraham | **D. Stabenow** | R | 14,478 | 7972 | **50.8** |
| MN | R. Grams | **M. Dayton** | R | 7640 | 11,957 | **53** |
| MS | T. Lott | T. Brown | R | 4349 | 40 | 32.4 |
| MO | J. Ashcroft | **M. Carnahan** | R | 9588 | 8884 | **51** |
| MT | C. Burns | B. Schweitzer | R | 5161 | 2034 | 48.3 |
| NM | J. Bingaman | B. Redmond | D | 2967 | 656 | 38.3 |
| ND | K. Conrad | D. Sand | D | 2600 | 400 | 38.6 |
| OH | M. DeWine | T. Celeste | R | 6975 | 477 | 37.5 |
| PA | R. Santorum | R. Klink | R | 12,910 | 3641 | 46.5 |
| RI | L. Chaffee | B. Weygand | R | 2265 | 2328 | 42 |
| TN | B. Frist | J. Clark | R | 7543 | 176 | 33.1 |
| TX | K. B. Hutchinson | G. Kelly | R | 4291 | 4 | 33.2 |
| UT | O. Hatch | S. Howell | R | 5224 | 296 | 32.5 |
| VT | J. Jeffords | E. Flanagan | R | 2084 | 1085 | 27.9 |
| VA | C. Robb | **G. Allen** | D | 7013 | 9980 | **52.3** |
| WA | S. Gorton | **M. Cantwell** | R | 7204 | 11,571 | **50** |
| WV | R. Byrd | D. Gallaher | D | 1247 | 0 | 20.6 |
| WI | H. Kohl | J. Gillespie | D | 5492 | 582 | 37.6 |
| WY | C. Thomas | M. Logan | R | 749 | 4 | 23 |

It is often thought that the more money an incumbent spends on reelection, the greater chance he or she will have success in defeating an opponent. While it is certainly true that incumbents have a near perfect rate of reelection absent any scandal or devastating blow in his or her personal life, it may not be the dollar amount spent that is crucial. Gary Jacobson argues that Senate incumbents are obviously more well-known than the challenger (Jacobson 1978). The incumbent has likely been sending out franked mail for the length of his six-year term. Regular appearances on both the local and national media are commonplace, as is hosting events for the constituents around the state. Because of this exposure, dollars spent are sometimes wasted money, for the public is already aware of the name.

Alan Gerber attempts to disprove Jacobson's claim that because of the regular attention the incumbent has received, any additional campaigning is often futile. He counters Jacobson's contention with the idea that incumbents can still mold the challenger's reputation with the extra funding, rather than the incumbent continually talking about himself (Gerber 1998). Despite a senator being in office for a six-year term or more, there is always new information he can bring to the table, either new legislation he or she has recently drafted or a new negative attack on the challenger. Interestingly, campaign spending limits have been proposed to try and maintain fairness in the election process. Perhaps the goal of such limits was to give rise to more competition between an incumbent and the lesser-known challenger, who would no longer be at a complete financial disadvantage. Unfortunately this may work to hurt the candidate in which it intended to assist. Alan Gerber writes, "campaign spending does have an important effect on who wins and it is the amount spent by challengers (and other disadvantaged candidates) that actually make the difference. Spending limits, if they have an effect at all on competition, can only work to the detriment of the challenger" (Gerber

1998). The U.S. Supreme Court has barred any limits on spending, citing an infringement on free speech.

It appears that Alan Abramowitz is in agreement with Alan Gerber, noting that while it appears that challengers are simply not quality candidates when paired against an incumbent, in actuality, it is the campaign spending and finances of a challenger that determines if winning is a realistic goal. As Abramowitz studied in 1980's House elections, challengers had to spend more money in the '84 and '86 elections than in any previous election due to incumbents' financial advantages. A dollar of campaign spending during the 1980's generated less electoral outcome than ever before. Unfortunately, to further reduce competitive elections, campaign spending by challengers decreased by more than 30% in the 1980s House elections (Abramowitz 1991).

There is some optimistic research in the field of political science, proving that not all hope is lost for democratic elections. Through research, we can see hope that elections do not solely favor incumbents. Gary Jacobson studies the relationship between spending and congressional election results. His research concludes that spending by challengers has a substantial greater impact on election incomes, while spending by incumbents has a much smaller effect (Jacobson 1978). Challengers will have to spend their campaign finances in responsible and efficient means, as each dollar is more effective than that of the incumbents. However, he notes, the average challenger must spend approximately $320,000 to become as familiar to voters as the average incumbent. Raising these funds as a little known challenger can prove to be quite difficult when running against a well-recognized, established political figure.

As can be seen in Table 2.1, it is no secret that incumbents are outspending their challengers on an overwhelming level, which clearly explains the high rates of incumbency. There are six rare exceptions in the 2000 Senate races where the challenger defeated the incumbent, and only three of these cases where the challenger spent more. In his research entitled "Campaign Spending in U.S. Senate Elections", Alan Abramowitz found that challengers spent more, earlier in the campaign (1989). Challengers were also spending more when there was a realistic change of defeating the incumbent, when the incumbent was rated as a high or medium risk of losing his or her seat.

There is serious debate as to how significant spending is for a campaign. Some political scientists feel after reaching a certain threshold, excessive funds do little to help a candidate defeat the sitting incumbent. Most, however, believe substantial fundraising is a direct correlation with a successful campaign. As Figure 2.1 can attest, nearly all incumbents raised more funds than the challenger, and a significant majority was successful in their respective races.

**IV. Case Study on Campaign Spending: Sharron Angle vs. Harry Reid**

**Table 3.1 "Candidate Spending in 2010 Senate Elections"**
*Source*: Opensecrets.org
*Note*: Bold state name indicates candidate who won election despite spending lesser amount
* indicates the incumbent candidate in the general election

| State | Democrat Candidate Raised ($) | Republican Candidate Raised ($) | Winner |
|---|---|---|---|
| Alabama | 5,870 | 8,557,473* | R |
| Alaska | 1,331,272 | 3,357,483 | I |
| Arizona | 1,334,034 | 21,878,921* | R |
| **Arkansas** | 12,341,633* | 3,057,617 | R |
| California | 29,331,343* | 21,521,397 | D |
| Colorado | 11,536,750* | 4,953,818 | D |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Connecticut** | 8,733,486 | 50,285,122 | D |
| **Delaware** | 3,852,049 | 7,539,252 | D |
| Florida | 8,860,405 | 21,741,330 | R |
| Georgia | 336,907 | 9,671,128* | R |
| Hawaii | 5,216,102* | 266,398 | D |
| Idaho | 93,490 | 5,098,869* | R |
| Illinois | 9,923,570 | 14,305,287 | R |
| Indiana | 2,368,351 | 4,396,274 | R |
| Iowa | 3,152,122 | 7,701,183* | R |
| Kansas | 32,017 | 4,154,081 | R |
| Kentucky | 5,905,455 | 7,809,324 | R |
| Louisiana | 3,957,917 | 12,560,392* | R |
| Maryland | 5,508,300* | 932,526 | D |
| Missouri | 10,331,090 | 11,932,403 | R |
| **Nevada** | 24,815,104* | 28,162,049 | D |
| **New Hampshire** | 4,939,739 | 4,414,291 | R |
| New York | 13,418,545* | 2,384,584 | D |
| North Carolina | 2,894,468 | 10,868,382* | R |
| North Dakota | 103,569 | 3,801,481 | R |
| Ohio | 6,391,470 | 16,540,629 | R |
| Oklahoma | 0 | 2,644,376* | R |
| Oregon | 6,930,089* | 2,375,849 | D |
| Pennsylvania | 8,590,124 | 17,155,694 | R |
| South Carolina | 0 | 7,199,774* | R |
| South Dakota | No candidate | 12,518,942* | R |
| Utah | 291,522 | 1,710,429 | R |
| Vermont | 4,869,504* | 232,549 | D |
| Washington | 17,124,667* | 9,643,935 | D |
| **West Virginia** | 4,395,107 | 6,288,292 | D |
| **Wisconsin** | 20,803,357* | 15,235,898 | R |

In my own original research, I chose to compare the amount of funds raised versus the success rates of the candidates. Using Opensecrets.org's congressional finance records for 2010 Senate races, I noted the dollar amount in Table 3.1 that was raised by each of the main party candidates and the eventual party winner. In the 36 U.S. Senate races that took place in November of that year, there were a meager seven races where the candidate who spent less actually proved victorious in the election. Looking at these results, it is no wonder that candidates feel the need to fundraise heavily.

I wanted to further examine what went wrong in those seven elections, where the winner actually spent significantly less money than his or her opponent. I will focus mainly on the 2010 Senate race that attracted much media attention: incumbent Senator Harry Reid of Nevada and political newcomer Sharron Angle. As can be seen in Table 3.1, Reid raised just under $24 million, while tea party backed candidate Angle took in approximately $28 million. Just how did Sharron Angle fundraise with such success, against the Senate Majority Leader with such an established political career in the state of Nevada? Furthermore, with so much extra cash, how did Sharron Angle manage to fall short against Harry Reid?

In the 2010 Senate elections, Harry Reid was the incumbent that many wanted to see defeated. His prestige in the Democratic Party as Majority Leader combined with a recent decline in popularity in an already failing Congress made him a central target for his opponents. Sharron Angle earned the position as Reid's main opponent after winning the Republican nomination. She was vaguely familiar with some Nevadans as a former member of the Nevada Assembly and a candidate for Congress in the 2006 election.

In the third quarter alone of Sharon Angle's race for the Senate seat, she raised $14 million. As PBS noted, Angle's fundraising feat was one of the largest amounts of all time and the second highest cash intake for a candidate in 2010. Just several months earlier though, then Senate candidate Scott Brown beat this record in his competitive race against Martha Coakley (Chalian 2010). Another highly publicized race like that of Reid's race, this prominent election was for the late Senator Ted Kennedy's seat. When the longtime liberal from Massachusetts passed away, Republicans knew they could pounce on the opportunity to replace the seat with a conservative alternative. Sharon Angle wanted to similarly defeat her competitor, and give the Republicans another seat in the Senate. Several years earlier, another high-status election that also broke fundraising records was that of the New York Senate race in 2000. Republican Rick Lazio attempted to defeat the prominent Hillary Clinton of New York. With the former First Lady running for a Senate seat, much attention and party support was given to this New York race. Rick Lazio managed to raise a record breaking $22 million in the third quarter of 2000, but still suffered a devastating loss (Chalian 2010).

Certainly, it did not hurt Sharron Angle's campaign to constantly make the national headlines and have several prominent endorsements from around the country. In fact, Angle made mention in her concession speech that a large majority of her funds actually came from out of state. This appears to be a commonality among the three aforementioned elections of Sharron Angle, Scott Brown and Rick Lazio. Though only one emerged as the winner, all three had the national Republican Party's support and substantial monetary assistance. In elections with such massive consequences for the party as a whole, financial backing and encouragement will generally travel from all regions of the country and reach record amounts. For former Nevada Assemblywoman Angle, she ended up spending $97 per person in the election, deeming it the most expensive congressional contest on a per-vote basis (Farnam 2010).

Unfortunately for Sharron Angle, money could not buy a win in the 2010 Nevada Senate race, proving that record funds does not guarantee success. The candidate made several major blunders that no amount of money could help, which seems to be a common trend in candidates who suddenly strike gold with their campaigns. While on the campaign trail in May, Angle told a Nevada radio station that she wants to "go through with the elimination of the Department of Education" because "it's not the federal government's job to provide education for our children" (Nevada Public Radio 2010). This sense of extremism did not sit well with many Nevadans, and appeared much too radical for a mainstream candidate. The political gaffes did not stop there for Sharron Angle, as she often appeared out of touch with her constituents, the very people who were pouring money into her campaign. Sharron Angle appeared to be alienating the vulnerable jobless population of Nevada in another May radio interview. She states, "unemployed Nevadans who depend on unemployment insurance are spoiled" (KRNV Reno 2010).

Whether it's an accumulation of political blunders made at public events or simply appearing out of touch with constituents, many times endless funds is not the answer. As can be seen by Sharron Angle's failed campaign, a candidate must have both the political aptitude in addition to strong financial backing. Harry Reid took advantage of Sharron's brief stay in the limelight and eventually proved successful in the 2010 election. Fortunately in a democracy such as ours, a constant influx of cash does not always guarantee election results.

**V. Gender and Racial Biases**

In addition to a significant incumbent advantage, the gender bias plays a role in who runs for Congressional seats. Gender is a simple heuristic device that helps voters determine the most qualified candidate. Rather than researching each candidate's platform before Election Day, one can simply look at the name of a candidate and vote by gender. As discussed in *The Role of Gender Stereotypes in U.S. Senate Campaigns*, Fridkin and Kenney explain the recent increase in women vying for Congressional seats (2009). The two authors set out to determine if gender plays a role at the voting booth. They find various traits that are associated with each gender. The electorate sees women as more liberal than men, as well as honest and compassionate. Men are more often characterized as strong, experienced and competent. Examining the set of qualities that each gender possesses, does one gender have an unfair advantage due to a quality that cannot be controlled?

As Richard Fox and Jennifer Lawless state, the public is often confused at this bias though, for men are not more appealing to voters. The partiality exists in the initial stages of elections. Women are far less likely than men to emerge from the list of eligible candidates, because of a number of factors. Men are much more likely to receive encouragement from political elites to run for office. Women feel the need to be asked to run for office, which does not occur as often. In addition, women do not feel as qualified to run for office, simply because they feel politics is a male dominated field. Fox and Lawless clarify that among those who do run for office, there is absolutely no gender disparity and therefore they encourage women to run (2004).

In actuality, women may benefit in some elections due to their gender. For example, in the 2006 Senate elections some speculated the corruption and scandal associated with this era encouraged voters to trust women more than men. Men like Jack Abramoff and Rep Mark Foley tarnished the male name in politics. As Jeffrey Milyo and Samantha Schosberg conclude, since 1984, female candidates for the House have had more success at fundraising and obtaining large and early contributions. Beginning in this decade, there is no proven electoral or financial disadvantage to be a female running for office. Though this was the case in the 1970s and earlier, the gender bias simply does not exist once candidates are declared in the race. Milyo and Schosberg do note, however, that despite equivalent fundraising efforts, female candidate spending is less productive in swaying the electorate. They speculate this stems from candidate inexperience and less support from peers (Milyo and Schosberg 1998).

On top of the uncontrollable element of gender, we must also consider the aspect that race plays in Senate elections. As David Andersen and Jane Junn studied, black candidates have exponentially increased on the ballot for political office, particularly since the 1970s. Beginning in this decade, black candidates for local office were having great success in winning, but were still limited to district where the black population was dominant. Beginning in the 1980s however, black candidates were winning in districts where the black population was small. It is no doubt that race is associated with several campaign issues that many candidates stress, both in the past and present-day: welfare and crime. It is very difficult to pinpoint exactly how race affects the electorate's attitude toward the candidates. Andersen and Junn worked to find a national election where a voter had to choose between two black candidates, despite the state having an overwhelmingly white electorate. This would act as a control and minimize any racial stereotypes. The voter would be forced to evaluate each candidate based on his strengths, rather than taking skin color into consideration (Andersen and Junn 2010).

The 2004 Senate race in Illinois posed two African Americans against each other; Barack Obama as the Democratic Party nominee and Alan Keyes, a conservative African American political commentator, for the Republican Party. Keyes was a replacement for a Republican candidate who dropped out due to a scandal. Barack Obama was often the candidate who was deracialized in the media throughout the election, which earned him positive feedback from white Democrats. Racialized portrayals have significant impact on elections, as race plays a critical role at the polls. In a 1995 study by C.K. Sigelman, findings show that black candidates are perceived as more compassionate toward disadvantaged and minority groups, but less competent than white candidates (Sigelman et al. 1995). If true in the 2004 Illinois Senate election, Obama was considered to be the more competent candidate because of his lighter skin tone. One critical race study, performed by Nayda Terkildsen, studied if the "darkness" of a black candidate makes a difference in an election. Her findings suggest that a person with darker skin pigments is judged and criticized much harsher than those lighter skin black candidates, like Barack Obama. Terkildsen says black candidates with dark skin "are the victims of a triple bias- race, prejudice, and skin color". Perhaps Obama's success over his darker pigmented competitor in the 2004 Senate race came down to the shade of black of their skin color (Terkildsen 1993). Despite Terkildsen's study though, many contend that Alan Keyes was a weak candidate. Among other factors, Keyes had not even lived in the state of Illinois before the election. It is hard to tell whether Barack Obama was successful because of his skin color or if he was competing against an unappealing candidate.

**VI. Voter Behavior**

Though personality will not reflect political ability once in office, how a candidate reacts to the public and media certainly comes to the forefront on Election Day, in addition to gender and race. This will ultimately reflect how voters respond at the polls. As studied in "The Role of Candidate Traits in Campaigns", Fridkin and Kenney found that incumbents tend to respond best in polls rating candidates' charisma (2011). This is likely due to the experience they have in dealing with citizens, having already won at least one election. Also, constituents tend to have a pre-existing opinion of the personality of an incumbent. Throughout an incumbent's campaign, he will undoubtedly stress his experience and leadership capabilities in the campaign. This can be seen on television commercials, advertisements and other means of public outreach.

Fridkin and Kenney designed an experiment to determine whether candidates can alter a constituent's opinion. Examining separate models for incumbents and challengers, the two political scientists assessed candidates based on honesty, compassion, experience, intelligence and leadership ability. As a race becomes more competitive, people are more likely to rate both the incumbents and challengers, and therefore a majority of the results come from competitive, costly elections. By evaluating the five traits, Fridkin and Kenney find that the nature of the campaign is more pertinent to the challenger than the incumbent (2011). Studied by both social psychologists and political scientists alike, citizens' personality assessments of candidates do make a substantial impact in elections. First studied only at the presidential level, it can now be asserted at the senatorial level. Perhaps with these findings, candidates will pay exceedingly more attention to their interactions with voters and consider how their attitudes come across to the average constituent.

Once the electorate is at the voting booth, the individual may consider other factors beyond incumbency, gender and race. As Scott Basinger and Howard Lavine attest, voters may rely on ideology rather than other factors such as party (2005). The process of voting does not necessarily require extensive knowledge in the subject, but a candidates campaigning strategies often affect how one votes. The more competitive a race, the more money is spent and therefore the more informed the public becomes.

The social-psychological model is a rationale of voting in terms of individual attitudes often arising from group characteristics. It can be explained by an individual's attachment to a party, attitudes toward the candidate or feelings about a particular issue that is prominent in an election.

As Wendy Rahn studied, stereotypes have a large influence in how one chooses a candidate on Election Day. She notes that in partisan elections, the political party is the most obvious cue. Despite a voters' lack of knowledge with any of the candidates, he or she can look for political party and decide based solely on this. Rahn studied this behavior through two avenues: a theory-driven mode based on stereotypes and a data-driven mode based on learned information. In her studies, she found that a party label is not the only factor voters use to determine the right candidate. Voters use a more policy-based approach when selecting a candidate when there were no party labels on the ballot. However, heuristic-based voting takes precedence when party labels are provided, as in every U.S. Senate race (Rahn 1993).

As previously mentioned, Danny Hayes contends that in addition to party cues, voters also decide how to vote via candidate qualities (2010). The personalities of presidential candidates play a key role in elections, though they are often tied to political parties. The Republican Party has the reputation of strong leadership, while the Democrats can boast a record of compassion and empathy. In order to gain a stronger base at least in presidential races, each party must change their attitudes and cater to the opposing party's electorate. The Democrats must seek a stronger role in leadership while the Republicans must convey more compassion on social issues. However, in Senate races the philosophy is typically different. Fewer people look to these generalizations of the party, but instead vote more on the individual.

There are many avenues that an individual should take into account before voting for a candidate in an election. Often times, the party label is the only aspect one needs to vote.

While voting strictly along party lines may be the easiest way of deciphering between candidates, it is often not the most effective. The social-psychological model of voting is an explanation as to how individuals vote. Whether it's by party, candidate personality or the issues they support, there are many factors that go into voting at the polls.

Kahn and Kenney propose that in order to make the public more informed on Senate elections, the competition between candidates must be closer (1999). Fortunately, as will be seen in a future section, Senate races are growing steadily more competitive. To further this trend, candidates must spend a bulk of their campaign finances early in the election season. This will provide voters with in depth information about a more unknown candidate. They also see a large benefit if television stations were required to give Senate candidates a set amount of free advertising time. The authors propose that citizens and politicians must demand the media to improve their reporting with more factual information. This would help eliminate misleading information in a campaign and set the stage for a more competitive, fair election. It is no doubt, though, that biases in media coverage are occurring today, and may not be solved by a more competitive election. Furthermore, while a competitive election certainly increases the possibility of an informed electorate, there are still measures to be taken to improve the turnout for a Senate election.

**VII. The Struggle to the Voting Booth: Why Vote?**

For many, voting in an election is seen as a nonsensical activity. The cost of voting far outweighs the benefits. One must drive to the polling location and think about which candidate to choose, all while taking time out of a busy schedule for the average American. The United States does not offer a holiday for Election Day nor does polling ever occur on a weekend. With these obstructions in the way of our democratic society, why should one ever vote? Getting the public to vote in Senate elections, specifically in midterm years, proves even more difficult. Because these elections are much more low-profile than presidential races, one must examine the benefits, if any, of voting.

As James Fowler explains, by using the traditional calculus-based model of voting, there is no wonder that the United States has a dismal voter turnout rate. Many political scientists adopted the traditional rational choice theory, which states that the reward is dependent on many variables such as the significance of the vote, the cost of voting, and the psychological benefits one feels by participating in a democracy. A more modern approach though, Fowler contends, is the altruistic model. This adds the variable of "benefits for others" (Fowler 2006). A citizen should care about the benefits that others feel from the preferred outcome and not just for personal reasons. The author agrees that, while the probability of changing the outcome of an election is miniscule, the number of people affected by a candidate is quite large. Therefore, the cost of voting decreases if the voter cares about the well being of others.

It is not simply the benefits that one will receive that will increase voter turnout though, as John Aldrich reports in "Rational Choice and Turnout" (1993). In a competitive and expensive election, on average, voter interest will increase and eventually so will voter participation. This is most likely because of the more abundant advertising and campaigning that each candidate will engage in.

Aside from close, competitive elections, voter turnout has seen a steady decrease in presidential elections since the 1960 and in congressional elections since 1962. According to Aldrich, this is due to a rise in doubting the government, or external efficacy (1993). Many citizens perceive the government as an institution that is not responding to the electorate in solving pressing problems. As external efficacy decreases, voter turnout will continue to follow in the same direction.

The state of the economy also influences voter turnout and can decrease the costs of voting for the electorate. As stated in "Economic Voting Theory: Testing New Dimensions", in good economic times, voters will reward an incumbent (Lewis-Beck et al. 2010). Conversely, in a poor economy, voters want to punish an incumbent and elect the challenger. However, many political scientists are ignoring the fact that the economy may look different to a large group of people. Some voters hope to see higher taxes and greater welfare, while others want less government regulation. Therefore, differing economic policies will drive certain individuals to the voting booth while others will see no incentive to vote.

As many political scientists contend, voting is an irrational act because it costs more to submit the ballot than one will get in return. However, when analyzing the rational choice model, one must take into account other factors such as state of the economy and altruistic benefits. One can only hope that the benefits will outweigh the costs for a majority of the population or our democratic society will eventually cease to function.

**VIII. The Distinctness and Similarities in House and Senate Elections**

While it may be correct to group the House of Representatives and Senate into the collective term "Congress", the two chambers are quite unique. The elections are far from similar and the campaign strategies that a candidate utilizes are just as different. In addition, both chambers are affected differently by the presidential elections that occur every four years.

One of the fundamental differences is the frequency that the member is up for election, where House members must run every two years but Senators maintain their seat for six. Because of the staggering of Senate terms, one-third of the Senate runs for election every two years while two-thirds of the Senate keep their seats without an election. Another essential difference between the two chambers is the constituencies that each represents. House members are elected by districts; a more homogenous population and typically only a portion of a state. Conversely, senators are representative of an entire state and must appeal to a more diverse and large population. As previously mentioned, Senate elections often garner more media attention due to the high volume of money spent in each race as compared to House elections. With all of these basic differences, is it safe to conclude Senate elections are far different than their House counterparts?

Prominent political scientist Richard Waterman contends that despite the basic fundamental differences in the two chambers of Congress, their electoral outcomes are actually quite similar (1990). Waterman notes that much more research has been put into House elections, beginning with the widely accepted surge and decline theory. This hypothesis, coined by Angus Campbell, states that the president's party will surely lose House seats during the midterm election. Campbell explained that because there is such greater turnout in presidential election years, people will vote for their preferred presidential candidate in addition to congressional candidates of the same party. In midterm election years, when turnout is much lower, fewer people defect from their parties because there is much less information known about the candidates. However, this theory can only be applied to House elections due to their short two-year terms. Senate candidates, who serve for six years before reelection, are not campaigning often enough to warrant a referendum on the sitting president. Similarly, another theory states that voters at the midterm election actively vote to penalize the party of the president. Again, this theory only holds true for House elections.

Richard Waterman thus attempted to formulate a theory for all congressional elections that could be utilized for both House and the Senate to predict which candidates will likely be losing their seats. Taking the partisan era from 1938 to 1988, he studied the exposure variable. This theory essentially explains the extent to which a party's seats exceed (overexposure) or fall short (underexposure) of its normal share of seats. He concludes that in order to maintain the equilibrium, a party that is underexposed will have a much easier time in gaining seats. The party that is overexposed will encounter more trouble in the subsequent election.

Waterman's theory becomes more advanced when he differentiates between short-term shocks and more long-term disturbances in electoral patterns. Waterman predicts that changes in the partisan makeup in both the House of Representatives and the Senate are related to the more long-term stability of the electoral system. For instance, a brief change in voting behavior could be caused by the popularity of the sitting president or the stability of the economy. Event such as these would likely not change the current equilibrium and the shift in seats would be temporary. On the other hand, a more significant event such as the Great Depression could permanently alter the equilibrium and establish a new norm of seats for each party (Waterman 1990).

After examining the similarities and differences in the House and Senate races, we must also examine the relationship between Senate elections and the more familiar presidential contests. While Senate elections may draw more money, media attention and people to the polls than House elections, presidential races are the most recognized of all. As mentioned above, House elections are accurate indicators on the popularity of the president. When the sitting president is widely accepted by the general public, House members of the same party can expect an easier time in the next election. This study has been adopted by most political scientists and has proven true for quite some time. However, James Campbell and Joe Sumners wanted to prove either the accuracy or incorrectness of this theory when applying it to Senate elections (1990). Are Senate and House elections similar in this aspect as Richard Waterman might expect, or is the presidential coattailing effect a significant difference between the two chambers that is only experienced in the House?

There has been very little research on Senate elections as a whole, and even less on the coattailing effect. The few studies conducted in the 1980s showed a very minimal effect, yet there was still evidence present. Many essentially found that Senate elections are not necessarily a referendum on the president, but a popular president will certainly raise voter turnout at the polls. Those that maintain the belief that there is no data to suggest that coattailing is present affirm that Senate elections are too visible and candidate-centered for someone to rely on the president's approval rating.

Campbell and Sumners found in their more recent study that there is certainly some coattail influences that effect Senate elections. They contend that while it may not be as significant as in House elections, coattailing may have actually been decisive in several Senate elections that they studied from 1972 to 1988. In addition, presidential coattails have some effect on subsequent races. Their study found that 65% of the prior vote is carried over to the next election, meaning that Senate candidates can utilize more than half the strength of the original coattail in a future race. Despite these figures, there are still many who have attempted to prove that coattails are insignificant and offer little support. While the effect may be small, any added benefit can be utilized in a close race for a Senate seat (Campbell and Sumners 1990).

Surely Senate candidates will take any added advantage they can get, such as the minor benefit of coattailing the president's electoral success. The little gain they can get from this effect and other strategies may prove essential, as recent research suggests that Senate races are much more competitive than those in the House. One explanation for this is the greater incumbency effect that House members experience. Because of this, there is a far greater sense of vulnerability that Senators must overcome.

One hypothesis for closer election results and increased vulnerability in Senate races is the constituency difference between the House and Senate. House districts are typically smaller and less populated and therefore candidates can interact directly with more constituents. Unfortunately for Senate candidates, there is much less interaction with people around the entire state. Due to this problem of larger constituencies, generally the state populations are much more diverse than a single district. It is harder to appease a larger group of people and often the candidate alienates some constituents based on a policy decision or a political promise. Therefore, in Senate races it is less common to see one candidate with a substantial lead and thus closer competition is more frequent than in the House competitions.

To study outlying factors aside from the difference in constituencies on the competitiveness of House versus Senate elections, one must look at elections where the House district is the entire state. Currently, there are seven states where the population is sparse enough to warrant only one representative, who represents the state at-large. Still, these states must have two senators, a requirement for every state regardless of population.

David Nice of Washington State University studied this exact effect on Congressional races from 1922 to 1980. His findings are consistent from races where the House member represents only a portion of a state. The House candidates in statewide race still were successful in winning by larger margins than the Senators, despite campaigning to the exact same constituencies. This remained true with the incumbency advantage for House members as well. In this same time period of Nice's study, the House incumbent representing the entire state was still reelected by larger margins and more often than the Senate candidate. With almost flawless results, the two main hypotheses remain true regardless if the constituency is identical in the seven unique states. There is still greater House incumbency rates over the Senate. Also, House members continue to win by greater margins even in cases of identical constituencies (Nice 1984).

With more limited research than both House and presidential elections, Senate elections still follow certain trends that exist within Congressional elections. House and Senate elections may be more similar than previously assumed, at least according to Richard Waterman who stands behind his exposure thesis and the equilibrium effect. While he states that a significant shock, such as an economic depression, can change the party in power in either the House or Senate, there is other research to suggest otherwise (Waterman 1990). Campbell and Sumners (1990) contend that at least for House members, there is a significant coattailing effect. This is not as significant in Senate races, where the candidates are much more vulnerable and the races tend to be more competitive. There is therefore evidence suggesting that there are similarities between the two chambers in Congress, but also vast differences in the elections. Perhaps with more research on the Senate side, future political scientists can further differentiate between the House and Senate.

**IX. Conclusion**

Elections have certainly evolved since our country's founding in the eighteenth century. What began as a more autocratic system of choosing senators became more democratic with the passage of the Seventeenth Amendment. This allowed for the voters of each state to directly elect their respective members of the United States Senate, who serve to represent their constituents on a statewide level.

Aside from simply the manner in which each senator is elected, there are numerous facets of each election that are always shifting, depending on current trends in the political arena. In recent decades, elections in this country have become much more candidate oriented. Senate candidates become the center of the campaign and the party attached to the name becomes secondary. There are certain aspects, however, that will help a candidate become more successful and increase their chances of obtaining a seat in the upper chamber of Congress.

The ideal candidate possesses specific characteristics and engages in certain actions that make him or her more suitable to be elected. There exists what appears to be a gender and racial bias, as there is little diversity in Congress. In addition, and perhaps more studied amongst political scientists, is the trend in increasing campaign finances and the incumbency effect. A large majority of incumbents are reelected in Senate races, partially due to more campaign funds and easier accessibility to the media and news outlets.

There are exceptions, though, when the candidate who raised more money was actually defeated. This can be seen in the recent Nevada Senate battle between Harry Reid and Sharron Angle. There appear to be more aberrations from the typical trends in the Senate, while the House of Representatives is more predictable. Not only are incumbency rates higher in the House, but the coattailing effects appear to be greater in the lower chamber as well. Despite much less attention focused on the Senate and its elections, there is still enough evidence to provide both the numerous similarities in the two chambers and the vast differences. Only time will tell if the House and Senate will grow further apart or if their relationship will become more fused.

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